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TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: GAZA, IRAQI NATIONAL RECONCILIATION
PLAN, GREATER MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE, ARAB STUDENTS IN U.S.

SUMMARY: Local Arabic-language press continues harsh criticism of Israel's Gaza incursion. Government-owned "Oman" newspaper uses more direct language in reporting on Iraq and calls the national-reconciliation initiative a "positive step." "Al-Watan" ponders the fate of the Greater Middle East Initiative. The state daily positively notes efforts by the U.S. government to attract more Arab students. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

1. Israel's Gaza incursion continued to receive strongly negative coverage in the local press. In a July 7 front-page article, privately owned Arabic-language daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) reported that Israel had used unspecified "internationally-banned weapons." Arabic papers front-paged photos of a dead Palestinian boy bloodied by Israeli fire. In "Al-Watan," the accompanying text described Israel's incursion as a "terrorist attack" (wording not repeated in the government-owned "Oman"). "Al Watan" led July 8 coverage with "Thirty-one Martyrs in Two Days; The Occupation is Confident of an American Veto." An accompanying photo depicted Palestinian civilians fleeing Gaza.

¶2. Language in the government-owned, Arabic-language daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) has taken a firmer line in regard to Iraq, with, for example, terms such as "sectarian fighting" replacing the less-specific "acts of violence" or "attacks," "militias" replacing "armed gunmen," and characterizations such as a "war of mosques" appearing for in headlines for the first time. These new phrases mark the first acknowledgement in state-media coverage of the sectarian dimension to conflict in Iraq.

BLOCK QUOTES: "GLOBAL SILENCE" OVER GAZA

¶3. On July 6, Government-owned, Arabic-language daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) deemed Israel's Gaza incursion a "Collective Tragedy:"

"What incites Israel to continue its aggression is not global silence or American justifications alone, but local supporters as well. These supporters play their own role in minimizing Israel's excesses against the Palestinian people by continuously criticizing the work of the Palestinian organizations that must deal with their fierce enemy. By this criticism, they send a negative message to the world, one that could be interpreted by Israel to be in line with its own interests, leading the world shall to look at the situation through Israeli eyes... Israel has taken full advantage of the international silence and continued to ignore even the calls of her allies and friends, who are sometimes embarrassed by such a silence. Israel's persistence in embarrassing its allies is part of a well-prepared game that it is used to playing and using as a way to convict the whole world. Though this, Israel forces others to accept and concede to its wishes and judgment, depriving international opinion of its ability to restrict its movements or take any positive action. The international silence confirms the bitter fact: the Palestinian issue has been withdrawn from the American camp and is solely a matter of Israeli internal affairs."

SOLDIER'S KIDNAPPING "MERELY A PRETEXT"

¶4. July 7's "Oman" editorial continued the theme, saying that "Israel's Escalation Increases Risks:"

"It is not an exaggeration to say that the situation in the Occupied Territories in particular, and in the region at large, is undergoing highly dangerous developments. In the past, before the kidnapping of the soldier, Israel used tactics of physical liquidation, storming Palestinian villages and towns and closing borders to pressure the Palestinian people. The kidnapping of the soldier is merely a pretext for its latest insane military operation to ravage and destroy Palestinian towns, with no deterrent or moral restraint... It is very important to ease the situation in the Palestinian territories, and continue negotiations for the release of the Israeli soldier, as well as that of Palestinian ministers and members of parliament who have been kidnapped by Israel, in addition to other Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails... Israel has worried that Hamas and Fatah might reach a deal, defusing Israel's excuse that it has no Palestinian partner with which to negotiate. Who provided this excuse for Israel and paved the way for it to carry out all these acts that are condemned and denounced by all measures? The facts show that there are Palestinians who have facilitated Israel's plan to carry out whatever it wants to do."

IRAQ RECONCILIATION PLAN A "POSITIVE STEP"

¶5. On July 8, "Oman" commented on the Iraqi national reconciliation initiative, calling it "A National Necessity:"

"In the sea of tragic events and violence that covers Iraq, the national reconciliation initiative launched by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki is a positive step on the path of Iraqi reconstruction. For this initiative to bear fruit, the participation of all political powers, parties, sects, and tribes

is important... They should play the national role assigned to them and discuss all problems directly, including the scheduled withdrawal of U.S. and British forces from Iraq. This matter greatly impacts the rule of law and the state's dedication to reconstructing civil and security institutions. Foreign forces will leave Iraq sooner or later, and thus the mission of the Iraqi government and parliament should focus on reconciling Iraqis amongst themselves, with no exceptions. Within this framework, if the initiative needs some flexibility in terms and conditions, such as excluding some groups or individuals, this is possible. Meanwhile, Arab countries should provide political support for Iraq and for helping its people achieve their potential. This could be achieved by providing the necessary support to national reconciliation endeavors, and doing everything possible to boost peace and stability in the country."

WHITHER THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST?

16. In a July 8 column in privately owned, Arabic-language "Al-Watan" (circ. 42,000), commentator Mohammed al-Toubi queries "The Greater Middle East Initiative: Who Silenced It?"

"The so-called 'Greater Middle East Initiative' embodied several strategic designs which include imposing hegemony on the whole region, securing known oil supplies and unexploited ones (as in the Baltic Sea), and ultimately achieving the greatest goals, which are Israel's integration into the Arab community and the besieging of Iran, China, and Russia... The occupation of Iraq and the current contention over the oil wealth in Darfur between the West (particularly Washington) and China, and the latter's reluctance to sacrifice its interests in Iran due to the Iranian nuclear issue, reflect the extent of this competition. There is a continuing question: why have supporters of the Greater Middle East Initiative been silenced? In my opinion, a number of important matters have been a thorn in their throat... First: the emergence of Islamic movements classified by America and Europe as radical or terrorist, which swept the recent elections in many Islamic states, including Hamas in the occupied Palestinian territories. Second: Iraq, where American ambitions and endeavors to form a sectarian government have failed. Also, significant hurdles remain for the formation of a national unity government, including the issue of the militias formed inside the government's security organs and taking part in the killing campaigns. This is in addition to scandals of the American armed forces, starting with Abu Ghraib Prison and including the rape and slaughter of the Iraqi teenager and her family. Added to that is the American casualties in Iraq which have exceeded 2,500, according to the Pentagon. All these factors have sunk Bush's popularity to the lowest level of any previous American President. Very loud voices at both the official and popular levels are asking for a timetable for American armed forces to pull out of Iraq."

PROGRAM ALUMNUS PRAISES STUDY IN THE U.S.

17. On July 4, journalist (and recent participant in American University's Summer Institute on Democracy and Elections) Haider Abd al-Ridha al-Lawati commented in "Oman" on "The Arab Student at U.S. Universities:"

"In the past two years, the U.S. Administration has implemented a number of procedures and reforms to encourage Arab students to study in the U.S., such as offering online information, and easing the student visa process. In addition to revenue that international students provide, it seems that the American people are working to know more about the Arab world, reflected by the fact that the number of American students studying Arabic doubled between 2003 and 2005. This educational exchange is important and serves the interests of people around the world. It yields dialogue and cultural exchange, especially in the area of religions... Education aims at prosperity and the advancement of human science."